Research exercise: Flying with Angels

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Flying with Angels
A Social Justice Learning and Living Cohort Community Project

2012 Service Learning Experience

Abstract

The Building Communities through Social Justice Learning and Living Cohort (BCSJLLC) strives to help students understand the importance of social justice by focusing on educating the whole person. This is done by linking learning and scholarship with leadership and service learning. The primary mission of the BCSJLLC is literacy and all cohort members perform service learning in the community by tutoring. The cohort was trained by the LLC’s community partner Project READ to tutor students in K-8 and young adults. Project READ then placed us in tutoring positions at Holy Angels Catholic School. The mission of Holy Angels Catholic School is to help their students excel academically while growing in leadership and faith. Through our partnership with this school, we made relationships with the students and the staff and learned more about the Dayton community. We worked with a fifth grade and sixth grade class helping them with their multiplication and division tables, we assisted first graders with recognizing their vocabulary words on sight, and we read one-on-one to kindergarteners. We believe our service learning experience helped our students, but we know they have helped influence and make a difference in our lives by allowing us to apply the Marxist principles of lead, learn and serve.

Building Communities for Social Justice LLC

Mission Statement:
We are a learning community that:

• engages in a process of intellectual inquiry
• productively negotiates and creates space for critical listening and the free exchange of ideas
• holistically integrates academic, residential, and co-curricular experiences
• deploys the principles and methodologies of the Humanities disciplines, specifically those associated with the study of English, Philosophy, and Religion
• fosters an interdisciplinary approach to fundamental human concerns, e.g., what it means to be human
• focuses on apprehending and addressing issues of Social Justice, such as stewardship, solidarity with those different from us, commitment to the integrity and equality of all human life, and dedication to the common good
• encourages undergraduate research that is informed by the experience of service learning

Service Learning Organization Mission Statement:
We are a vibrant education ministry of the Parish committed to challenging our students to grow in faith and excel in academics within a caring Christian environment.

The Cave

Plato (429-347 B.C.E.), a classical Greek philosopher, is one of the most influential authors in the history of philosophy. In 580 B.C.E., in The Republic, a Socratic dialogue in which he discusses his concern of the definition of justice. Many of Plato’s works of literature are concerned with education and this remains true in Book VII of The Republic, which consists of The Allegory of the Cave. In this allegory Plato writes a metaphor about men who have never known anything more than what they see. They are chained inside a room with their heads facing straight ahead, where all they see are shadows casted behind a fire above them. Various statues are then manipulated by a group of people that cast a shadow on the wall in front of the prisoners. The prisoners believe the shadows they see are reality since they know nothing more. One of the prisoners is eventually allowed to leave the cave and experience the real world. When he comes back he tries to enlighten the current ones by telling them stories of what the world is like. However, the prisoners only laugh at him telling him his eyes have been spoiled. The image of the cave in the story is a metaphor for education or the lack of it in our culture. The prisoners believe that the shadows they see are reality because they have not been able to experience anything else and as a result are lacking true knowledge. The purpose of this allegory is to show society that reality is not limited to only what we know and see and that it is important to know ones’ ‘cave’ and experience reality.

A Theory of Social Justice

John Rawls, born in Baltimore, Maryland in 1921, is presumably one of the most important political philosophers of the twentieth century. After leaving the army in 1946 he returned to Princeton University where he completed his Bachelor’s degree, and started writing about moral philosophy. His first book, The Theory of Justice, published in 1971, revolves around two principles of justice that would guarantee a moral and just society while also challenging utilitarian political philosophy. Rawls writes this book in regards to the classical problems of modern political theory. These problems include those relating to basic civil liberties and how the loss of freedom for some can never be made right by a greater good shared by others. This relates to Rawls’ idea of the ‘difference principle’ that any law or regulation is acceptable only if it benefits those who are most disadvantaged. Much of his principles also relate to the primary goods for a society in which everybody should have equal rights to. For example, the Liberty Principle states that every individual has an equal right to basic liberties. According to Rawls, the goods of society, especially liberty must be distributed fairly. Through our mentorship at Holy Angels Catholic School we were able to fulfill the difference principle by giving our aid and support in areas that the school needed assistance in. We worked with students who wanted to improve their test scores and academics so that they could reach their fullest potential. The experiences we gained at Holy Angels were very rewarding and through living by Rawls’ principles we were able to make a difference.

Outcomes

• Build a comfortable relationship with students
• Gain experience working with students
• Provide assistance with homework and studying
• Ensure the students understand their work

Reflections

Mariana Lopes

Tutoring students in math and helping others with reading is an experience that most college students are not able to be a part of. Personally, I gained many insights through participating in this tutoring program at Holy Angels. I was able to work with the same student in mathematics for several weeks, which made the experience so much more enjoyable. It was rewarding seeing the improvements she made over the time period. Also, seeing her excited at my arrival every Monday and Wednesday was pleasing. I also enjoyed coming every week and learning more about her hobbies such as dance and soccer. We were always able to get to her work done as well as talk about other matters. As we both got more comfortable around each other, the efficiency and quality of her work improved tremendously. All the same, I am extremely glad I was given this opportunity. It allowed me to find more about myself and realize how much of a difference anyone can make on another’s education, health, and self confidence.

Alex Bobnich

When imagining my freshman year of college I did not expect to be mentoring younger students. The Social Justice LLC has given me a wonderful opportunity to do something I wouldn’t ordinarily do. I really enjoyed being able to interact and work with young students during these last few months. I remember when I was their age I sometimes needed help with homework assignments and I wish that I could have been part of a program similar to this. The students seemed really grateful that we were there which made it an even more enjoyable and worthwhile experience. Although each week there would be some new students, the majority consisted of the same. I worked with the same few girls multiple times which allowed us to build a relationship. Although I am majoring in Nutrition and Fitness, I can use the skills I learned while mentoring in my career since I may be working with children at times. Overall, this collaboration with Project READ and Holy Angels has been a positive and beneficial experience.

Allie McKenna

The experience I had working with Holy Angels exceeded all of my expectations. The program was highly organized and extraordinarily flexible. I enjoyed that I got to choose what time I was going to tutor on what days as well as being able to decide what I was going to do when I got there. While I was there, I helped kindergarteners write their three sentences on what they did that day, help second graders with their addition and subtraction by playing with money, or I could help a fifth grader with their multiplication tables. I also get to play outside with the students in the courtyard if all of them had finished their homework. Whenever activities that I did with the kids, it was looked at as important to the head of the after school program. This experience helped me realize that I have a lot of patience when it comes to young students as well as feeling grateful when I see the light bulb turn on in their head while doing homework questions that they were once confused about. With the knowledge that I learned about myself through working with Project READ and Holy Angels, it has made me more confident in my future job choice.